

THE CULTIVATION OF THE IMAGINATION IN CHILDREN.

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IT is in story land, however, that children's imagination most revels. No story however impossible but to them possesses the reality of the events of the actual world. In later life one may have the imaginative faculty quite as strong but reason has developed and puts out its cold restraining hand to check undue wandering. We cannot believe what is not in accordance with our knowledge of nature's laws and with the probabilities of human action, and we are too observant of the mechanism by which the fiction is produced, whether it be the style of the language of the story we are reading or the staging of the theatre play that we may be witnessing. Charles Lamb describes his experience on witnessing his first play. He was not past six years old, and the play was *Artaxerxes*. "It was being admitted to a sight of the past. All feeling was absorbed in vision. . . . I was *in* Persepolis for the time being, and the burning idol of their devotion almost converted me into a worshipper." He describes a later visit when past childhood's age. "The same things were there materially, but the emblem, the reference, was gone! . . . The lights—the orchestra lights—came up a clumsy machinery. The first ring, and the second ring, was but a trick of the prompter's bell which had been, like the note of the cuckoo, a phantom of a voice, no hand seen or guessed at, which ministered to its warning. The actors were men and women painted. I thought the fault was in them, but it was in myself, and the alteration which those many centuries—of six short twelve months—had wrought in me." This is not the smallest part of the price which we have to pay for the purchase of what is known as experience.

A child's appetite for stories is insatiable, and when one's stock is completed the little glutton clamours for them to be repeated, and no amount of repetition makes them stale.

though he has them off by heart to every particular, and he will resent strongly the slightest deviation from the story as he knows it. At an early age—even between three and four years—a child will invent stories of his own, some of them marked by the boldest flights of fancy.

The very earliest tales that a child is capable of appreciating are of the simplest incidents in ordinary life, preferably with himself as the principal figure.

The next stage is that of the *fairy tale*. Here the personages are less real and the action is stronger, calling for a greater exercise of the imagination. The characteristics of fairy tales which make them appreciable by, and such a source of delight to, young children, are, in the first place, the simplicity of the characters—the princess is beautiful, the prince brave, the giant greedy and cruel, the dwarf malicious, etc.—that bring them well within the comprehension of the child. The *dramatis personæ* also include animals who talk and act in every sense like the human personages. The incongruity does not strike the child. They are his playmates and companions and their simple natures are perhaps more within his comprehension than those of men and women. A second characteristic of fairy tales is the simplicity and the plain violence of the action which, while well within the child's comprehension, contain incidents that pleasantly excite his simple emotions of pity, sympathy, love of the beautiful, and, especially, the emotion in which children find their keenest pleasure, that of gentle terror and breathless suspense in the contemplation of a great danger followed by a joyful triumphant relief. The happy ending may be regarded as a third essential characteristic of the fairy tale, the triumph of the good and beautiful over the wicked and ugly, satisfying the child's sense of the moral fitness of things. In this last characteristic one perceives a value in fairy tales in educating the moral side of the child's nature.

The indulgence of children in fairy tales is a stage in the proper development of a true and healthy imagination. It possesses features analogous to that of the mythological stage in the development of the race, and, as Dr. Adler remarks in his book on the Moral Instruction of Children, "It is a commonplace of educational literature that the individual

of to-day must pass through the same stages of evolution as the human race as a whole." Fairy tales are the proper pabulum for the development of a child's imagination, as milk for the development of its physical body, later on in due course will come the strong meat of the imaginative literature of real life with all its complexity.

So impressed have some educationists been with the educative value of fairy tales that Ziller, who advocated the education of children by what he called "Culture Stages," recommended as the first stage, to extend over the first school year, as a basis of character-forming instruction, twelve selected fairy tales from Grimm's collection. Olive Schreiner, again, in one of her books makes the interesting suggestion that the sourness and cramped sympathies found in the character of the Boers may be due to an absence of fairy tales in their early education. John Stuart Mill has expressed regret that his early education was that more befitting a youth than a child, and testifies that children learn more from fables, myths, and hero tales than from precept and dogma.

It may be here remarked that it is not necessary for their enjoyment of fairy tales that children should believe that they are real, and it is not well that they should be allowed to regard them as such. They can, and will, more or less at the time of narration, give free reins to their imagination and snatch to the full for the time being that fearful joy that gives them their delight, though at the back of their consciousness they realise that they are mythical.

Much can be done by fairy tales, and by the tales of adventure that follow, to develop the moral character. Young children are scarcely moral beings. They may be kept moral by the habits imposed, but morality that is merely a bundle of habits is not true morality, or as Kant put it "A man who does good by habit is not a good man." The mere exhortation to children to be good is generally ineffective as it is with older people, and the goody-goody books representing the spotless and exemplary career of some pattern child conspicuous for nothing but priggishness, which Dickens has so well satirized, weary children. Sandford and Merton and mawkish books of that class are happily now relegated to the past. Morality, that is, regard for the good of others, and its concomitant, sympathy,

are founded upon imagination and may be developed by tales of simple action enlisting the child's sympathies with the virtuous and the weak and his detestation of the wicked and the oppressor. So, in real life, a child's pity and regard for the weak or for the brute creation can best be stirred by appealing to the child to imagine himself in the other's circumstances which seldom fails to effect the required result. Many persons are cruel simply through lack of imagination, and in such cases the cruelty is often unconscious.

In due time the child's interest in fairy tales wanes and he seeks fiction having some relation to real affairs. This is the stage of tales of adventure such as those of Ballantyne, Henty and Fennimore Cooper, which satisfy the growing reason by depicting possible incidents, and yet are narratives purely of action that stir the imagination and rouse the emotions, and which appeal, if well chosen, to sentiments of chivalry, bravery and truth.

Following tales of pure adventure come tales combining adventurous action with the play of human character—such are the novels of Stevenson and Scott—then later come such works as those of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, in which action and adventure are reduced and the social feature predominate. These last possess a value in giving an insight into human character and the conduct of human affairs, which, although they cannot dispense with the need of practical experience, go far to assist in acquiring a knowledge of one's fellow-men.

Before, however, these last stages are reached the fruits of the reading or the hearing of fairy tales, and later fiction, is seen in the interest the child will show in biography, history, poetry and other literature, the study of which is regarded as falling more within school education. The imagination is needed as much or more for an appreciation of this higher literature, and the more thorough its exercise and training the better its capability for meeting the higher requirements. History will follow inappreciably upon the tales of fiction if commenced, as it should be, by biography and the narratives of stirring events.

The cultivation of the imagination in school life, however, I do not propose to discuss. It is sufficiently within the scope

of such an address as this, dealing with a subject of such wide interest and so many parts, to confine attention to the home aspect, and even then there can be no pretence to do more than deal with it in a discursive fashion, touching it at one point and another by way of mere suggestion without any attempt at systematic treatment, which, indeed, the shortness of time and the magnitude of the subject put out of the question. The main essential is to recognise the importance of the imagination and the meaning of the impulses which Mother Nature, fearful to leave the training of so valuable a faculty in our clumsy and ignorant hands, has implanted in the child to give play to his imagination and by exercise strengthen it. Indeed, so well does Nature seem to do her work in the case of young children that one is tempted to advise paradoxically that the best way to educate their imagination is to do nothing. In one sense this is true and in the past incalculable harm has been effected by ill-advised interference. We can, however, with the imagination, like as with a plant, contribute to its healthy growth by placing it under the circumstances most favourable for its development and by careful training and judicious nipping prevent rank growth.

I shall, therefore, not attempt, and it would be needless for me, if indeed I were able, to do more than suggest generally and in brief the lines upon which the development of the imagination may be assisted.

It has been said that imagination must work upon actual knowledge acquired in the first place through the senses, and the most elaborate romance that has ever been conceived is but as a tessellated design constructed of innumerable fragments of scenes and events which have been actually cognisant to our senses. Thus a child in reading or hearing of scenes or events which he can only realise by an effort of imagination must do so by comparison with those of which he has already knowledge. The vividness and accuracy of this mental image depend upon the strength of his imagination and upon the approximation in likeness between the object he is to imagine and the objects in his actual experience with which he mentally compares it. For instance, a child living in a hot climate who has never seen a piece of ice cannot have so clear a conception of

an iceberg as a child who has seen a piece of ice and knows its qualities, nor can the latter have so clear a conception as another child who has seen ice in large masses, say in a glacier, and observed its lovely blue colour. Again, a child who has always lived in a plain must have but a very vague realisation of the appearance of the Alps. Since imagination, then, is wholly founded upon knowledge acquired directly by the senses, it is of the first importance that children should early be given as wide an opportunity as possible of acquiring knowledge at first hand, and the surroundings in which they are placed must be such as they are able to understand. For this reason the country and the common operations of country life are better than town scenes. The primitive life is more within the understanding of the young. Herbart remarks that for every boy the best companions are peasants, shepherds, hunters of every kind, and their sons. Everyone must have observed the intense interest which children take in the common operations of farm life. Parents, therefore, who make the interests of their children their chief consideration should carefully study each summer, with this end, where the children can spend the holidays to best purpose. Too often one finds the holiday resort chosen with the sole view of the parents' pleasure and children taken invariably year after year to a fashionable inland spa or watering place with benefit doubtless to the children's bodily health, but almost valueless, after the first visit, to what is of even greater importance, their mental health. Their holidays should be varied from year to year so as to give them acquaintance in turn with the seaside, with farm, with mountain, with river and with forest, and, later on, with foreign countries, and especially should town children be taken far away from town life and brought as close to nature as possible. Scenery has a strong effect upon the imagination, particularly scenery that gives great breadth of view—the inhabitants of mountains are notably of strong imaginative natures.

Having placed children among natural surroundings interesting to them, it is a mistake to exercise too close a supervision. Children themselves know best what they require to see. What most interests them, and not what most interests their elders, makes the deepest impression.

There is a danger in these days of effecting too close a supervision over children in the way of directing what they should do, and not allowing them sufficient time for reverie. Discretion must be used in this as in everything else, and to state that children should be left to their own resources does not imply that the parent cannot do much by suggestion and directing attention and also by showing a fellow interest in children's occupations to greatly assist and encourage them in their observation of things.

A knowledge of *nature at home*, so to speak, is the first basis for a sound imagination, but this should be followed up by taking the child to collections of objects of interest to him, such as the Zoological Gardens, and Museums, and, later, when his historical studies begin, to places such as the Tower and St. Paul's Cathedral, and to sites of battles and other notable events, as the sight of these objects will greatly assist the child afterwards in imagining the scenes that have occurred there, besides investing the narratives with greater interest.

Much can be done to stimulate and to assist the imagination of children by means of pictures, and when the objects themselves cannot be shown this is the most effectual method of representing them to the child's mind.

Words, not things, have been in the past too largely the attempted vehicle of information to the young. A word can merely suggest an object to the mind, and if the mind has no previous image of that object the word is meaningless. In one school I attended the pupils were taught theoretical chemistry first and practical chemistry later in the higher classes. The imagination, therefore, in the first study had nothing to lay hold of. It was a mere juggle with words, and while in the lower classes, although I passed examinations in the subject, I knew no chemistry.

As to children's toys and children's play generally, much can be done by a wise selection of toys, which should be adapted to the child's disposition and inclination. If a boy shows an inclination to nurse dolls there is no reason why he should not be supplied with them as with toy dogs or toy horses. He will soon grow out of them. Often a boy shows a strong partiality for mechanical toys, this should by all means be encouraged.

In regard to play, children should be allowed largely to take their own bent. Companionship is a stimulus to healthy play and much thought should be given to the choice of suitable companions.

In regard to story telling and the books to be read by children, it is of the greatest importance that a careful choice should be made. In particular must care be taken that the tales imparted to children are not of too gruesome a character. Much harm can be done in this way to a child's mind, which may be often injured, perhaps permanently, by harrowing tales thoughtlessly told. Especially should this be avoided in the case of timid or highly imaginative children who have a power of realising the stories told them with a vividness of which we have no conception. Some few of Grimm's fairy tales are of such a character that they are not suitable for the ordinary child. Children are not, it is believed, naturally afraid of the dark, but often a terror of it, which clings to them through life, is begotten by stories of the hobgoblin type. Inconceivable is the harm which incompetent or malicious nurses can do to a child of a highly imaginative character, and it is a marvel what little care parents sometimes exercise in the choice of nurses who have the care of children at their most impressionable age, and when the child is most influenced by his surroundings for good or for evil.

Discretion should also be exercised in arranging the sequence of the books to be read by children after fairy tales are laid aside. Much will depend upon the child's taste and disposition, and all that need be said is that the progress should neither be too fast nor too slow, but keep proper pace with the development of the mind. It is as objectionable to see a girl of twelve reading, say, a book by Miss Braddon or Marie Corelli, as for her to be still hankering after fairy tales. Girls often show a strong liking for boys' books of adventures. The stimulus to the imagination in books of adventure is as desirable, though not perhaps in the same degree, for girls as for boys, and it is a fitting preparation for their subsequent study of history or reading of Shakespeare and Walter Scott, which are as much the prerogative of women as of men.

If the true aim of education is the formation of character, then the reading of healthy books of adventure and,

subsequently, classical novels is not merely, or even chiefly, of use in the training of the imagination, but serves the much higher purpose. There is no doubt that the reading of such works as those of Scott, Dickens, George Eliot and Thackeray, between the ages of ten and sixteen contributes far more towards the formation of character than any other form of book learning.

The first essential, therefore, for the cultivation of the imagination is to give it full opportunities for a natural and healthy growth, but one has not only to guard against a stunted growth from want of exercise or of material to feed upon, but also against a rank growth arising from want of restraint. Imagination is a good servant but a bad master. A person whose mind dwells too much in the world of romance becomes dissatisfied with the hard and cold realities of life, and he wastes his emotions upon idle fantasies so that they fail to respond to the real calls about him, he becomes out of touch with his environments; or he may grow into a mere dreamer, and become unfit to cope with the practicalities of existence. These are the moral dangers, and arise from the will becoming too weak to control the imagination. There is also the intellectual danger of confusing fact and fiction, which is due to the imagination being allowed to transcend the reason.

These are dangers that should be carefully guarded against, and the need becomes greater as the children become older. With the very young the danger is more apparent than real, for while many young children live during the greater part of their time in a world apart, this is not necessarily due to an over indulgence of the imagination but to the fact that the imagination with them is a strong growth while reason and the will power are still budding. These can be depended upon to assert themselves as they mature.

With children the royal road to knowledge is through the imagination. The acquisition of knowledge, being a satisfaction of one of the deepest needs or appetites of the mind, should be a process of the keenest pleasure if the right method is followed. The child as soon as he can talk and walk, even before, sets up school for himself in his nursery, and is school-master and pupil in one. His toys are the apparatus of his little

laboratory, and this, his first school, is immeasurably superior in method and results to later schools when he is displaced from his position of schoolmaster and becomes pupil only. Children can teach us far more than we can teach them, but we have been painfully slow in recognising this, else we should not have had to wait till this the beginning of the twentieth century to discover that the cause of the failure of our elementary education was the neglect to train the imagination. This could have been learnt ages ago by observation of any child in his little nursery school.

This address would be incomplete without some reference to the Aesthetic or Artistic Imagination in children, but time will not admit of more than a mere reference. In the aesthetic imagination, as distinguished from the practical or inventive, reason does not play a strong part. The aesthetic may therefore be expected to be well developed in children and that is found to be the fact. The beautiful appeals strongly to children and almost every child is an artist. Their appreciation of rhythm and fondness for dancing is one indication of this. Children also, as a rule, are very fond of painting and of drawing, though as their eye is not yet trained to distinguish minute differences in colour, nor the hand trained to direct the pencil, great merit cannot be expected in their early productions. Both drawing and painting should be strongly encouraged. Children love to have their drawings criticised, and by comparing them with the objects they are intended to represent and pointing out defects the children's powers of observation can be greatly improved.

It is in music, however, that precocity in the aesthetic imagination most displays itself. Mozart composed music at three years of age and Haydn at four.

The development of the child's imagination on the aesthetic side can be assisted by encouraging him in all his artistic efforts and also by placing him in artistic surroundings and calling attention to the beauty of the objects around him. George Sand tells us that during her first long journey in Spain in her fourth year her mother used to say "Look, how pretty that is," and adds "Immediately those objects, which I should not have remarked of myself, revealed to me their beauty."

Childhood has been called the Golden Age of the Imagination.

I have made no plea this evening for its indulgence or its development beyond the utilitarian. No other is needed, but were it needed we have it in overwhelming abundance in the pleasures and those of the highest and purest in our nature that are opened to us by the imagination. It gives life all its colour, all its charm, even all its meaning. For it, time does not exist, nor space, and on the wings of the imagination we can fly the world and conquer time. What wonder then that our poets call this faculty divine, or that Wordsworth should have seen in the glory that shines round the child in his imaginative view of the world, the after-glow of the celestial light of some previous existence, which gradually fades before the hard light of our common day :—

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore ;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.
* * * * *
Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting :
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home :
Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy ;
The Youth, who daily farthest from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended ;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

THE DAUGHTER OF BRABANTIO.

BY RICHARD DICKINS.

IN the working out of the tragedy of *Othello*, Shakespeare employs but seven characters of any importance, and only one of these is wholly sympathetic—the much wronged father, Brabantio. Brabantio only appears in the first Act, the part is one of not more than some 140 lines, but in that small space Shakespeare succeeds in giving us the most beautiful and, we think, the most pathetic study of a father to be found even in the wonderful gallery which contains such portraits as those of Lear, Prospero, Shylock and Leonato.

No contrast can be greater than that between the fathers, Brabantio and Capulet.

It is impossible to suppose that Brabantio had ever spoken an unkind word to Desdemona or that he could have felt any expression of his love for her too tender. Capulet when his will is crossed by Juliet, assails her in terms which can only be described as brutal, and which explain and excuse his daughter's failure to make any appeal to him before entering into a secret marriage.

Cymbeline and others of Shakespeare's fathers of revolted daughters, were themselves responsible for their troubles by endeavouring to force distasteful marriages upon their children, and even old Leonato in his grief and despair, sides against poor Hero, in the hour of her sore need.

How different would the scene have been had Brabantio been Leonato, and Desdemona Hero ; then the daughter would have found a sure refuge in her father's arms and the cowardly slanders of twenty princes would not have shaken his trust in his child.

There is, of course, no parallel between Brabantio and Lear. Lear is a study of senile decay, and although he loves his daughters, his anger masters his love on the slightest provocation, and he curses his youngest daughter without cause as

NOTE.—In the author's paper on "The Character of Hamlet," which appeared in the October number of this Review, the name of the impersonator of Hamlet in Shakespeare's time, was by an oversight given as Betterton instead of Burbage.